



Did You Know?



Highlighting the Scope & Impact of the VA Mission

VA has been a leader in the federal government's welfare-to-work hiring program. As of July 31, VA achieved 91 percent of its goal, hiring 720 people at 200 different sites to fill such occupations as pharmacy technician, food service worker, veterans claims examiner, telecommunications equipment manager, and nursing positions. VA's goal is to hire 800 welfare-to-work employees by Sept. 30, 1998.

Over the last 50 years, VA has formed the most comprehensive academic-health system partnership in history. Formal affiliations exist with 107 medical schools, and VA supports 10 percent of graduate medical education in the United States. More than 34,000 medical residents receive all or part of their training at VA health facilities and 22,000 medical students annually participate in VA-based clerkships. In addition, VA trains some 54,000 pharmacists, podiatrists, optometrists, and more than 40 other types of health care professionals every year.

In FY 1997, VA treated 3.1 million patients, more than ever in its history. This was accomplished with 23,000 fewer staff than three years ago.

The largest national cemetery spans 902 acres and is in Calverton, N.Y. It is also the busiest with 7,290 burials in 1997. Overall, VA maintains more than 2.2 million grave sites in 115 national cemeteries. In 1997, 73,007 veterans were interred in VA cemeteries, the most ever in one year.

VA continues to be among the leaders in solving the Year 2000 computer problem. About 94 percent of VA computer systems are already prepared for the next millennium, and all systems should be ready in 1999.

VA has paid for the college education of more than 20.7 million veterans and has guaranteed more than 15.5 million home loans for veterans.

Unlike many public and private hospitals, every VA hospital is accredited under the strict standards

published and administered by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). VA facilities consistently receive higher scores on average than non-VA health-care organizations that pass the JCAHO screening.


VA is the largest user of American flags. About 500,000 are purchased each year; most are used as burial flags for deceased veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) is the largest volunteer program of its kind in the federal government. Some 350 national- and community-based organizations support VAVS. An estimated \$40 million in gifts and donations are annually contributed from 109,716 volunteers and their organizations.

VA is the lead agency on Gulf War Illness research. It, with the help of other federal agencies, has sponsored or conducted 121 research projects on Gulf War veterans' illnesses, including epidemiology surveys, mortality studies, studies of the health effects of diesel and oil well fire smoke, pesticides, depleted uranium, parasitic infections and exposures to chemical warfare agents. In addition, VA has established four Environmental Hazards Research Centers to study the possible health effects of hazardous exposures of Gulf War veterans.

About 2.7 million veterans receive disability compensation or pension payments from VA, and some 655,403 widows, children and parents of deceased veterans are being paid survivor compensation or death pension benefits.

VA constitutes the largest integrated network of homeless assistance services in the nation with specialized and mainstream programs to help homeless and at-risk homeless veterans. These services range from psychological war trauma assistance and pension benefits to transitional housing and drop-in centers where veterans can clean up, wash their clothes, and get a meal. More than 100,000 veterans benefit from these programs each year.



VA leads in the treatment and research of alcoholism, investing some \$500 million annually .

VA is the single largest provider of care to people infected with HIV in the United States. More than 27,700 veterans with AIDS, approximately six percent of the adult and adolescent cases reported, received care from VA as of 1997.

VA is becoming more efficient as it reforms the way it provides health-care services. Between September 1994 and May 1998, 48 percent of all VA acute care hospital beds were closed. Since 1994, inpatient admissions decreased by 24 percent, while ambulatory care visits increased by 6.6 million episodes. And between October 1995 and November 1999, VA bed days of care per 1,000 patients decreased 61 percent — a rate more than five percent lower than Medicare.

VA has made a concerted effort to eliminate unnecessary paperwork to save time, reduce patient frustration and protect the environment. Between 1995-1997, more than 2,700 health-related forms were eliminated, and remaining forms and directives were transferred to CD-ROM or other electronic means.

VA 's intramural research program has really learned to stretch a dollar. Since being restructured in 1995, its funding has increased only 4 percent. But results show increased productivity with 30 percent more merit review projects, the establishment of two additional

rehabilitation research and development centers, 15 new cooperative studies, a new nursing research initiative, and numerous new studies and health services research projects.

The veteran population is getting older. VA expects the number of veterans 65 years or older to reach 9.3 million by the year 2000 when three of every five American men age 65 or older will be veterans. An increase in the number of veterans 85 years or older is also projected -- from 327,000 now to 645,000 in 2003.

VA researchers at the Brockton, Mass., VA Medical Center have successfully regenerated the peripheral nerves of rats across a 15 mm gap through the growth of supporting cells within a silicone tube. This work is being applied to spinal cord damage and may someday help veterans with spinal cord injuries. VA has committed more than \$6 million in the last five years to this and other studies involving spinal cord injuries.

Contrary to some information circulating on the Internet, veterans not enrolled in VA health-care programs by Oct. 1, 1998, will not forfeit their right to VA health-care services. Veterans can apply any time at their nearest VA medical center or by calling toll-free 1-877-222-VETS.

With more than a half-billion dollars of life insurance in force for veterans, VA ranks as the nation's fourth-largest life insurance institution.

